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## USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICIALS CELEBRATE HOMEOWNERSHIP MONTH WITH RURAL MISSOURI FAMILIES



Left to right: Undersecretary for USDA, Rural Development Gilbert Gonzalez, Greg Branum, Missouri Rural Development State Director, and Vickie Cochran, participant in the self-help housing program

Agriculture Acting Under Secretary for USDA Rural Development Gilbert Gonzalez met with first-time homeowners Tina Duncan, Vickie Cochran, Mr. & Mrs. Edward Hicks III, and Mr. and Mrs. David Redding during a visit to Poplar Bluff, Missouri. The visit was part of a series of events being held throughout the nation by USDA in celebration of June as National Homeownership Month and President Bush's initiative to increase home ownership opportunities across the nation.

"In rural communities across this great nation, USDA has been working with rural families since 1950 to bring new opportunities for safe, decent and affordable housing," said Gonzalez. "It is a proud moment to stand here today, with these four families, assisting them in making the dream of homeownership a reality."

Gregory C. Branum, USDA Rural Development State Director for Missouri and Master of Ceremonies for the

celebration, said, "I can't think of a better way to celebrate home ownership than to recognize these families. They have achieved the *American Dream!*"

Vickie Cochran and her three children purchased their lot south of Poplar Bluff in October 2004, and Mr. and Mrs. David Redding plus their three daughters purchased their lot to construct their new home a few months later. Mr. & Mrs. Edward L. Hicks III and their family of seven have purchased their lot north of Poplar Bluff and Tina Duncan and her two children have chosen their lot on Crestwood Drive in Poplar Bluff, MO. The new homes are being constructed by all members of the four families by utilizing the USDA Rural Development Self Help Housing Program. The qualified families are required to work about 25 hours a week which is approximately 65 percent of the construction work on the homes. Ozark Foothills Development Association (OFDA) provides the technical assistance and construction supervision to assist the families in this program as a partner with Rural Development.

The families are all excited about the anticipation of moving into the homes they have built. Once all the homes are completed, each new homeowner will have at least \$15,000 worth of sweat equity invested in the home and the satisfaction of knowing they built it.

During their visit to rural Missouri to celebrate Homeownership Month, Gonzalez and Branum presented the four families with U.S. Flags as keepsakes for this memorable day.

This self-help project is another way that USDA Rural Development is helping to achieve President Bush's goal of helping 5.5 million minority families attain the dream of homeownership by 2010.

"The Bush Administration is committed to utilizing USDA Rural Development investments to increase economic opportunities and improve the quality of life for rural Missouri families and communities," said Branum. "This is a commitment that is shared by U.S. Senators "Kit" Bond and Jim Talent and U.S. Representative Jo Ann Emerson."

Anyone interested in obtaining information regarding the Self Help Housing Program or any other assistance available through USDA Rural Development may visit the homepage at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/mo/> or can contact Pam Anglin, Rural Development Manager, at the Poplar Bluff Local Office of USDA Rural Development at 4327 Highway 67N, Poplar Bluff, Missouri 63901 or by calling 573-785-9679 (extension 4).

“Committed to the future of rural communities.”

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